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ABSTRACT

A survey of 210 academic deans and vice presidents at a variety of college and university types explored the administrators' perceptions concerning the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that they: (1) wish they had had upon entry into administration; (2) felt were currently needed by academic administrators; and (3) felt would be necessary for academic administrators in the next 5-10 years. Responses were tabulated by sex, highest degree held, and institutional type. Results indicated that technical competence, particularly in budgeting and finance, was the most commonly desired competence. The need for contextual competence, or the understanding of the environment in which higher education administration is practiced, competed with interpersonal competence for the second most desired ability. Communicative competence was the fourth most desired, and conceptual competence the fifth and least desired. Implications for training administrators are discussed briefly. A brief bibliography is included, and definitions of the five competencies are appended. (Contains nine references.) (MSE)

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If I'd Only Known: Administrative Preparation That Could Have Made a Difference

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

If I'd Only Known: Administrative Preparation That Could Have Made a Difference

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Being an academic administrator is hard work. Ask any faculty member who takes an administrative position, and the odds are she'll say being an effective administrator is more challenging than she had realized it would be, perhaps even as difficult as being an effective teacher and scholar.

Part of the difficulty is that few people entering academic administration have had formal, specialized preparation for the role (Moore 1981; Moore, Martorana, & Twombly, 1985). They often begin their administrative position lacking some of the skills and background knowledge needed for effective performance.

As a result, training for academic administrators is needed. Numerous professional organizations and universities offer seminars and workshops designed to strengthen participants' administrative skills and techniques. For example, the Association of Academic Affairs Administrators (ACAFAD) conducts a yearly Management Development Seminar for assistant associate academic deans. Kansas State University holds an annual conference for department chairs. Harvard University Institutes for Higher Education offer summer programs for mid-level and senior administrators. Also, there are over 90 higher education doctoral programs whose primary purpose is to prepare college and university administrators (Fife and Goodchild, 1991).

For a variety of reasons, it is unlikely that formal preparation at the doctoral level will become the required credential for mid- and senior-level academic administrators (Townsend and Wiese, 1991). Consequently, the need will continue for short-term professional development activities for academic administrators.

One step in formulating the appropriate "baseline subject content" for these activities would be to conduct a needs assessment on a national level (Haynes 1991, p. 5). Information about what is needed for effective academic administration would be helpful to professional organizations and institutions that develop seminars and workshops to assist academic administrators. It would also be helpful to faculty in higher education doctoral programs in their efforts to provide an appropriate curriculum for preparing college and university administrators.

To determine what kind of training would be useful for academic administrators, this descriptive, exploratory study asked practicing academic administrators their perceptions of what kind of preparation (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) would have been useful for them and would be helpful for other academic administrators. This paper will present their perceptions regarding

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the necessary knowledge and skills for academic administrators.

Methods

The population for this study was vice presidents/deans of academic affairs in the more than 2,700 non-profit colleges and universities listed in the Carnegie Foundation's A Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (1987). First 400 institutions were randomly selected after stratifying by institutional type to ensure a representative sample from each institutional type. Then the name and address of the vice president or dean of academic affairs for each selected institution was located in the 1993 Peterson's Guide to Colleges and Universities. The sample included 25 individuals from Research I Universities (6%), 15 (4%) from Research II, 19 (5%) from Doctorate Granting I, 21 (5%) from Doctorate II, 55 (14%) from Comprehensive I Universities and Colleges, 25 (6%) from Comprehensive II, 25 (6%) from Liberal Arts I Colleges, 55 14%) from Liberal Arts II, and 160 (40%) from Two-Year Schools. As determined by their first name, 27% (107) of individuals in the sample were female and 73% (293) were male.

In a researcher-designed two-page, open-ended survey sent in Fall 1993, respondents were asked to answer the following questions: (1) What knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes do you wish you had possessed when you first became an academic administrator? (2) What knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes do you think are currently needed by people entering academic affairs administration?, and (3) What knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes do you think will become necessary for academic affairs administrators in the next five to ten years? Respondents were also asked to state their sex and highest degree held. Their administrative title and institutional type were already known by the researchers.

For this study, respondents' comments about desirable knowledge and skills were tabulated by the respondent's sex and highest degree in conjunction with institutional type. The six combinations of sex and highest degree were 1) male with doctorate not in higher education; 2) male with doctorate in higher education; 3) male with no doctorate; 4) female with doctorate not in higher education; 5) female with doctorate in higher education; and 6) female with no doctorate. Each response by a participant was counted either as a separate, one-of-a-kind response or as similar to or the same as another response.

After all the responses about knowledge and skills had been entered (over 1,600 entries), they were then grouped according to competences needed to be an effective administrators. The competences were a researcher-designed modification of Stark, Lowther, and Hagerty's (1986) professional competences developed through their work on the nature of professional education. Using a grounded theory approach, they examined the literature on initial professional preparation for 12 professional fields, including education. They also surveyed over 2,000 faculty in 10 of these fields to determine what outcomes are addressed in professional

programs. The result of their research was a set of 11 professional preparation outcomes, including six professional competences and five professional attitudes. [1] The six professional competences are conceptual, technical, contextual, interpersonal communication, integrative, and adaptive.

The researchers used three of the six professional competences found in the Stark et al work (conceptual, contextual, and technical competences) and split their interpersonal communications competence into two separate competences: communications and interpersonal. Stark et al's adaptive competence, or the ability to anticipate and accommodate changes important to the profession, was perhaps expressed in a few responses that indicated the need for knowledge about change. However, these responses were so few that the researchers determined there was no need to use the adaptive competence. Stark et al's integrative competence, or the ability to meld theory and technical skills in actual practice, was not detected by the researchers in any responses. Table 1 lists the outcomes or competences used in this study, describes each one briefly, and gives examples.

To ascertain interrater reliability, both researchers coded the same set of responses to the question regarding what knowledge did they wish they had possessed when they first began their administrative career. When the codings were reviewed, interrater reliability was calculated at 90%. The primary researcher did the initial coding of five sets of responses and the next level of refinement for all eight sets of responses. She then categorized the resulting data in terms of the five competences. When she had difficulty in determining into which competence a response should go, both researchers discussed the coding of the response until they reached agreement about where it should go. Some responses were determined to be uncodeable. Approximately 10% of the responses were labelled as uncodeable.

Results

Sample

Fifty-three percent (210) of the questionnaires were returned; 40% (119) of the total sample completed the questionnaire. Response rates for completed questionnaires varied among institutional types: 24% of individuals at Research I Universities, 40% at Research II, 21% at Doctorate Granting I, 48% at Doctorate Granting II, 34% at Comprehensive Universities and Colleges I, 40% at Comprehensive II, 36% at Liberal Arts I Colleges, 56% at Liberal Arts II, and 38% at Two-Year Colleges.

Seventy percent (111) of the respondents were male and 30 (48) percent were female (Note: 73% of the sample was male and 27% female). Eighty-one percent (128) of those who completed the survey had either a Ph.D. or an Ed.D. Of the 31 administrators without a doctorate, 74% were in two-year colleges. Nineteen percent of the doctorates were in higher education. A higher education doctorate was most prevalent in the two-year sector: of those community college administrators who had a doctorate, almost half (47%) had

one in higher education.

Knowledge and Skills Respondents Wish They Had Possessed

Respondents were asked to state what knowledge (KWHP) and skills (SWHP) they wish they had possessed when they first became an academic administrator. In this section as in the other two sections, their responses indicate that the distinction between knowledge and skills is difficult to draw at times. When asked about skills they wish they had possessed, some respondents indicated the same responses as the ones given under knowledge should be used. Also the researchers believe that many responses to the questions about desired skills specified knowledge instead. To a lesser extent some of the responses listed under knowledge seemed to the researchers to reflect a need for a specific skill. Therefore, the researchers decided to report the findings about knowledge and skills collectively rather than differentiate between the findings on knowledge and skills.

Communications competence. More than 50 responses to desired knowledge and skills were coded by the researchers as reflecting a need for communications competence. In examining these responses, we saw clearly the effect of computer technology. Almost half the responses indicated a need for expertise in the newest medium for communicating one's thoughts--the computer. The need for competence in the traditional communication skills of listening, speaking, and writing was also expressed in almost half the responses.

Conceptual competence. The need for conceptual competence was reflected in 26 knowledge responses that indicated a desire for knowledge about higher education, including its history, familiarity with other disciplines, an in-depth knowledge of one discipline, and knowledge of K-12 education. No responses under desired skills were categorized as reflecting conceptual competence.

Contextual competence. Over 110 responses were coded as reflecting contextual competence. The greatest need was for an understanding of the legal issues and rules surrounding higher education. Other governance concerns surfaced in the desire for knowledge about how higher education institutions operated, how decisions were made, and what was involved in specific administrative or faculty roles. Another major area of interest was curricular matters. A few people expressed a need for knowledge of how their own or peer institutions operated.

Interpersonal competence. Desire for interpersonal competence when they began their administrative career was indicated in over 120 items. The ability to resolve conflicts or mediate was noted most frequently, followed by the ability to build teams and facilitate group interactions, and the ability to deal with difficult people. There is undoubtedly a story behind all of these responses, but we were particularly intrigued by one person's response. He wished for the "ability to read the mind of my administrative supervisor."

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Technical competence. Of the almost 150 items coded by the researchers as reflecting technical competence, over 60 percent indicated a need for competency in budgeting and finance. Respondents also clearly wished they had possessed abilities in time management and planning when they began their administrative career.

Knowledge and Skills Current Administrators Should Possess

Respondents were asked to state what knowledge (KCAP) and skills (SCAP) they thought was currently needed by people entering academic affairs administration.

Communications competence. Over 130 responses to the question of desired skills for current administrators were categorized as reflecting competence in communication. Almost half reflected the need for computer-related skills and knowledge and about half the need for expertise in the traditional communication skills of listening, speaking, and writing.

Conceptual competence. The 20 knowledge responses categorized as reflecting the need for conceptual competence fit into two main categories: the need for disciplinary knowledge or knowledge of the liberal arts, and the need for foundational knowledge about the higher education--its history, philosophy, and purposes. No skills responses were categorized as reflecting conceptual competence.

Contextual competence. There were almost 180 responses categorized by the researchers as reflecting the need for contextual competence. The primary interest was for expertise in academic governance, including legal issues or laws and regulations affecting higher education, organizational culture and development, and faculty norms. Knowledge pertaining to the teaching-learning process and the curriculum was also indicated in over a sixth of the responses. At the macro level respondents wished knowledge about the international environment or the national environment in which higher education functions, including knowledge about current national trends and issues and national demographics. There was limited interest in systemic knowledge about the structure of higher education and issues facing higher education and K-12 education. At the micro level a few respondents indicated interest in knowing about how one's home institution operated, including its mores. The only sector specific knowledge included a desire for knowledge of tech-prep models and articulation agreements.

Interpersonal competence. There were over 130 items coded as reflecting the need for interpersonal competence, with about a third simply being the need for "people skills" or "human relations" skills. Expertise in team or consensus building was indicated in almost 30 percent of the responses. The skill of mediation or conflict resolution was the next most frequently listed followed by expertise in management.

Technical competence. The need for technical competence was indicated in almost 200 responses. About 40 percent reflected a need for budgetary or financial knowledge, including knowledge of fund raising and grant writing. The next most frequent need

specific to higher education administration was for knowledge of evaluation of faculty or programs, followed by the need for curriculum and program development. The need for general administrative technical competence was expressed most frequently in the desire for knowledge of strategic planning followed by the need for ability in time management. Thinking skills in the form of analytical ability or more specifically the ability to analyze data were mentioned by a few respondents.

Knowledge and skills That Will Become Necessary in the Future

Respondents were asked to state what knowledge (KFAP)) and skills (SFAP) they thought would become necessary for academic affairs administrators to possess in the next five to ten years.

Communications competence. Over 110 responses were categorized under the communications competence. The effect of technology is clearly indicated in the responses. The need for computer skills and technological communication skills was indicated over 70 percent of the responses. Respondents also indicated the need for traditional communication skills such as listening, public speaking, and writing.

Conceptual competence. Only six knowledge responses and no skills responses were categorized as reflecting the need for conceptual competence. Respondents indicated a need for a background in the liberal arts, knowledge of a discipline, or " a larger world view." No response indicated a need for understanding higher education per se.

Contextual competence. Almost 170 items were coded as reflecting a need for contextual competence. At the macro level respondents wished knowledge about the international environment or the national environment in which higher education functions, including knowledge about current national trends and issues and national demographics. About 30 percent of the responses indicated a need for curricular knowledge, including the effect of technology on higher education, e.g., distance learning. About 20 percent of the responses indicated an interest in knowledge about academic governance, including legal issues or laws and regulations affecting higher education.

Interpersonal competence. In the more than 110 items coded as reflecting interpersonal competence, the most frequent need was for ability in team building, including the need for knowledge of TQM or CPI. The next most frequent needs were for human relations skills and the skill of resolving conflicts were most noted.

Technical competence. Over 100 responses were coded as reflecting technical competence. Budgetary and other financial skills were the most frequently noted (over 40 percent), followed by strategic planning skills, research skills, and time management.

Intersection of Responses with Demographic Variables

The researchers eye-balled the data for patterns among the demographic variables of respondents' sex, institutional type, and

highest degree, but have not attempted a statistical analysis.

Eye-balling the data did indicate a few patterns. Respondents from the community college were less apt to have a doctorate than respondents from other institutional types. Perhaps because of this, community college respondents were most apt to express a need for conceptual competence in the form of in-depth knowledge of a discipline. Community college respondents were also the primary ones who expressed a need for the sector-specific contextual information, such as knowledge about tech-prep program and articulation agreements.

The researchers could not discern any patterns regarding the intersection of respondents' sex and their comments.

There was also a flaw in the design of the study that affected the likelihood of finding patterns between respondents' educational background and their responses. In designing the study, the researchers assumed that respondents with a doctorate in higher education would be less apt than respondents without this degree to express their own initial need for competence in areas commonly studied in higher education programs, e.g., budgetary matters and legal issues (Townsend and Nelson, 1994). However, these assumptions were not entirely borne out. While respondents without a doctorate in higher education indicated they wished they had possessed knowledge about and skills in legal issues and budgetary and financial matters when they began their career in academic administration, so also did some respondents with a doctorate in higher education.

What the researchers forgot in designing the study was to ask those who had a doctorate in higher education administration to indicate if they had obtained the degree prior to their first administrative position. If they had and still expressed a need for skills in budgetary and legal matters, that might suggest something about the nature of preparation they had received in their doctoral programs. However, many students in higher education doctoral programs are already in administrative positions when they begin their programs (Townsend and Mason, 1990). Therefore, it is to be expected that they would not have expertise in budgetary and legal matters when they first began their administrative careers.

Discussion

When the responses are viewed collectively across the three broad questions of what knowledge and skills do administrators wish they had possessed, believe current administrators should possess, and believe future administrators should possess, certain commonalities emerge.

Technical competence, or the ability to perform tasks required of higher education administrators, was the most commonly expressed competence that respondents wish they had possessed and that they thought current administrators should possess. The greatest technical need was for knowledge and/or skills in budgeting and finance. This need was expressed in over 60% of the responses about

knowledge and skills respondents wish they had possessed. It was expressed in approximately 40% of the responses classified as reflecting technical competence for the other two questions.

The need for **contextual competence**, or the understanding of the environment in which higher education administration is practiced, jockeyed with the need for **interpersonal competence**, or the ability to deal well with people, as the next most desired competence. In reflecting upon the knowledge and skills they wish they had possessed when they began their administrative careers, respondents were more apt to express a need for interpersonal competence than for contextual competence. In retrospect, interpersonal competence in resolving conflicts and building teams would have been helpful. When asked about desired knowledge and skills for current and future administrators, administrators indicated a clear need for both interpersonal competence and contextual competence. Once again, the importance of expertise in team building and conflict resolution surfaced for both current and future administrators.

For all three broad questions, the responses classified as reflecting contextual competence undoubtedly expressed the need for expertise in governance concerns, including knowledge of legal issues in higher education. However, this need was most apparent in response to the question about what administrators wish they had known and least apparent as a need for future administrators. The globalization of the world and of higher education is apparent in some of the responses. The need for both current and future administrators to have an international perspective was indicated but was not noted as one respondents wished they had possessed.

Of the five competences, **communicative competence**, or the ability to communicate effectively, was the fourth most desired competence for respondents and for other administrations. The impact of computer technology on communications was clearly evident: The need for expertise in computers was the dominant need.

The least expressed need was for **conceptual competence**, defined either as understanding the theoretical foundations of higher education or having a foundational or in-depth knowledge of a specific discipline or of the liberal arts. As indicated earlier, the people most apt to express a need for some in-depth disciplinary knowledge were those people without a doctorate. People whose doctorate was not in higher education generally the expressed a desire for foundational knowledge about higher education as a field of study.

Implications for Research and Practice

Future research could include a partial replication of this study, with higher education program faculty also being asked to participate. A comparison of what program faculty think is needed with those of practicing administrators would provide insight into how likely it is that higher education doctoral faculty teach and programs offer the knowledge and skills practicing administrators believe they need.

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By concentrating on respondents' perceptions of the skills and knowledge necessary for effective administrators, this study examined administrative preparation from a technical-managerial perspective. Those who maintain that effective leadership of colleges and universities requires more than technical skills and knowledge about higher education would say this perspective is too limited (e.g., Bogue, 199). Examination of respondents' listings of desired attitudes for academic administrators may yield insights into their perspectives about the values and beliefs necessary for effective leadership.

The study's findings about desired administrative knowledge and skills have implications for providers of professional education for academic administrators. Three needs clearly emerge from this study: (1) ability to handle budgets and financial matters, (2) knowledge of laws and legal issues affecting higher education, and (3) expertise in use of computers. The message for higher education doctoral programs seems clear: offer (and probably require) courses in budget and finance and higher education law. Also, faculty and students in higher education programs must become proficient in the use of computers and instructional technology.

Proficiency in this area would also address a need that emerged in responses reflecting contextual competence for future administrators: the need for expertise in curricular matters, including such aspects as distance learning and the effects of technology. Other desired aspects of expertise in curricular matters included knowledge of program evaluation and teaching and learning styles. This knowledge should be offered through courses in curriculum and evaluation.

Competence in interpersonal relations may also need to be addressed in higher education doctoral programs. A course in group dynamics could facilitate the ability to build teams and perhaps to resolve conflicts, two needs frequently expressed in this study. At the very least, such a course could be suggested as an elective.

The findings of this study also have implications for professional organizations that offer short-term professional development opportunities. Topics of current interest are clearly those dealing with instructional technology, legal issues facing higher education administrators, and dealing with difficult people. It may not be possible to develop fiscal expertise adequately in a workshop.

However, the majority of academic administrators do not have a doctorate in higher education administration and thus are unlikely to be influenced by any changes in higher education administration programs. An implication of this study for all doctoral programs is their faculty and students need to expertise in computer technology and instructional technology. Given that instructional technology is reshaping how and what we teach, this expertise is needed for future faculty in any discipline. Also, since some of these future faculty will become academic administrators, their administrative competence in communication will be already developed as will their contextual competence in the area of instructional technology.

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Finally, the findings also have implications for current and future academic affairs administrators. Current administrators can gain a better understanding of what knowledge and skills to seek in candidates for administrative positions, e.g., fiscal expertise. These same candidates can better understand what knowledge and skills they should develop as part of their efforts to strengthen their candidacy and to project to the seasoned administrators who will interview them.

1. A cursory examination of the attitudes listed in response to the queries about desirable attitudes for beginning, current, and future academic affairs administrators indicates the responses did not reflect the professional attitudes included in Stark, Lowther, and Haggerty's (1986) typology: 1) professional identity, ethical standards, scholarly concern for improvement, motivation for continued learning, and career marketability. Rather, respondents tended to list mindsets such as humility, openness, fairness, honesty, and receptivity to change. A portrait of an ideal administrator could be deduced from their listing of desirable attitudes. The data about attitudes will not be addressed in this paper.

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Table 1
Professional Competences

Conceptual competence: Includes understanding the theoretical foundations of higher education

* understanding of the cultural, economic, historical, and philosophical foundations of education and higher education

Also includes the desire for

* doctoral-level knowledge of an academic discipline
* familiarity with subject area content of various fields, including the liberal arts

Contextual competence: The understanding of the current environment in which higher education administration is practiced. Indicated in the desire for knowledge of special sectors of higher education such as

* community colleges
* continuing and adult education
* developmental education
* international education
* vocational education

or of specific areas or topics within higher education such as

* accreditation
* cultural diversity
* curriculum
* enrollment
* faculty
* functions of non-academic departments
* instructional technology
* legal issues
* organization and governance
* roles of deans, department chairs, etc.
* state and federal regulations
* students
* student affairs
* teaching

or of knowledge specific to a particular institution and peer institutions

* institutional history
* institutional norms
* institutional politics

Technical competence: The ability to perform tasks or functions required of administrators in higher education institutions:

* budgeting and finance
* class scheduling
* curriculum development and revision
* enrollment management
* evaluation and assessment of faculty, students, staff, and programs
* fund raising
* grant writing
* student recruitment, advising, and retention

Also includes generic administrative skills such as

* analytical/thinking skills
* decision making
* goal setting
* information finding
* policy making
* problem solving
* strategic planning
* stress management
* time management

Interpersonal competence: The ability to deal effectively with people in order to accomplish one's work. Includes the need for knowledge of

* consensus building
* group facilitation skills
* leadership
* management
* mentoring
* negotiation, including with unions
* personnel matters, e.g., interviewing, hiring, firing
* supervision
* team development, e.g., TQM, CQI

Communication competence: The ability to communicate well orally and in writing. Is expressed in the need for skills in

* listening
* speaking
* writing
* use of computer

Adapted from Stark, Lowther, and Hagerty's Table of Professional Preparation Outcomes (p. 13) in Responsive Professional Education (1986).